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STATE FOR NEA/PPD (MCGUINNESS, CBOURGEOIS), R, NEA/ARN,
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SUBJECT: RAMADAN 2002: AMMAN

1. SUMMARY: EMBASSY AMMAN UNDERTOOK A NUMBER OF SPECIAL ACTIVITIES THROUGHOUT THE MONTH OF RAMADAN AIMED AT REINFORCING A MESSAGE OF RESPECT FOR ISLAM. SOMEWHAT TO OUR SURPRISE IN THESE TENSE TIMES, OUR JORDANIAN CONTACTS PARTICIPATED IN GREAT NUMBERS AT OUR EMBASSY RAMADAN EVENTS, INCLUDING TWO IFTARS, A CULTURAL EVENING OF POETRY AND MUSIC, AND OUTREACH EFFORTS HIGHLIGHTING RAMADAN AND EID ACTIVITIES OF SENIOR USG POLICYMAKERS. THE SUCCESS OF THESE EFFORTS APPEARS TO CONFIRM THE VIEW THAT WHILE MANY OF OUR CONTACTS, LIKE MOST JORDANIANS, ARE ANGERED BY SPECIFIC US POLICIES IN THE REGION, THEY REMAIN OPEN TO ENGAGEMENT ON A PERSONAL BASIS. END SUMMARY.

2. PA AMMAN PLANNED A NUMBER OF REPRESENTATIONAL EVENTS DURING THE ISLAMIC MONTH OF RAMADAN WITH MIXED EXPECTATIONS. WHILE THESE ACTIVITIES IN YEARS PAST HAD PROVEN SUCCESSFUL IN JORDAN, THEY HAD GENERALLY INSPIRED A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF BACKGROUND NOISE - AN OCCASIONAL NEGATIVE EDITORIAL, FOR EXAMPLE. WOULD OUR CONTACTS BOYCOTT OR POLITELY DECLINE OUR INVITATIONS THIS YEAR, GIVEN THE STRONG HOSTILITY EXPRESSED IN THE MEDIA AND BY MANY OF OUR CONTACTS TO U.S. POLICY IN THE REGION? THE FIRST TEST CAME NOVEMBER 20, WHEN PA ARRANGED AN IFTAR HOSTED BY AMBASSADOR GNEHM FOR CONTACTS IN THE MEDIA SECTOR. 2002 MARKED THE THIRD YEAR FOR THIS EVENT FOR PA AMMAN. WE BOOKED THE SAME RESTAURANT AS LAST YEAR, AND INVITED 160 JOURNALISTS, PUBLISHERS AND OTHER MEDIA CONTACTS. APART FROM A VERY FEW INVITEES WHO WERE OUT OF TOWN, A FULL HOUSE TURNED OUT FOR THE EVENT. WE FOLLOWED THIS EVENT A WEEK LATER WITH A SECOND IFTAR HOSTED BY THE AMBASSADOR FOR RETURNED JORDANIAN PARTICIPANTS IN US EXCHANGE PROGRAMS. AGAIN, APART FROM A VERY SMALL NUMBER OF REGRETS, THE EVENT WAS VERY WELL ATTENDED. THE GUEST LIST FOR THE SECOND IFTAR INCLUDED A GROUP OF RECENTLY-RETURNED ISLAMIC SHARIA LAW FACULTY, INDICATING A WILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE AMONG EVEN OUR MOST CHALLENGING AUDIENCES. BOTH IFTARS WERE MARKED BY A COLLEGIAL ATMOSPHERE, AND AT BOTH, AMBASSADOR GNEHM OFFERED WELL-RECEIVED WELCOMING REMARKS IN ARABIC. POST DISTRIBUTED AT THESE EVENTS MORE THAN 200 COPIES OF THE "MUSLIM LIFE IN AMERICA" BOOKLETS, AS WELL AS COPIES IN ARABIC OF THE PRESIDENT'S RAMADAN GREETING TO MUSLIMS AROUND THE WORLD.

3. SEPARATELY, CAO HOSTED A RAMADAN EVENING OF ARABIC MUSIC AND POETRY FOR ROUGHLY 30 CULTURAL CONTACTS OF THE EMBASSY. AGAIN, A FULL HOUSE OF YOUNG JORDANIAN WRITERS, ARTISTS AND MUSICIANS MIXED CASUALLY AND ENJOYED AN EVENING THAT INCLUDED LIVELY DISCUSSION ON CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATIONS AND RELATED SUBJECTS. SEVERAL INVITEES EXPRESSED PLEASANT SURPRISE THAT A TRADITIONAL RAMADAN EVENING OF THIS KIND COULD BE HELD AT THE HOUSE OF AN AMERICAN DIPLOMAT, AS RAMADAN EVENTS AROUND AMMAN HAVE INCREASINGLY MOVED AWAY FROM SUCH TRADITIONS IN FAVOR OF MORE COMMERCIAL PURSUITS LIKE PAID ENTERTAINMENT AND LAVISH RESTAURANT-HOPPING. THE ANNUAL FULBRIGHT IFTAR, PRIMARILY FOR AMERICAN SCHOLARS, SIMILARLY DREW A GOOD TURNOUT OF JORDANIANS, INCLUDING THE PRESIDENT OF A PRIVATE UNIVERSITY.

4. POST SOUGHT WIDE PLACEMENT IN LOCAL MEDIA FOR RAMADAN-RELATED STATEMENTS AND ACTIVITIES OF SENIOR USG POLICY MAKERS. ALL JORDANIAN DAILIES FEATURED PROMINENT COVERAGE OF PRESIDENT BUSH'S RAMADAN GREETING TO MUSLIMS AROUND THE WORLD AT THE BEGINNING OF THE MONTH. ALTHOUGH JORDAN'S NEWSPAPERS DID NOT PUBLISH DECEMBER 6-7, TELEVISION NEWS CARRIED THE PRESIDENT'S EID ACTIVITIES AT THE ISLAMIC CENTER IN WASHINGTON. POST ALSO FEATURED ON THE EMBASSY WEBSITE SECRETARY POWELL'S EID GREETINGS TO THE JORDANIAN PM AND FM,

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AS WELL AS NSA RICE'S IFTAR WITH FEMALE MUSLIM LAWYERS.

5. OTHER PA ACTIVITIES INCLUDED PREPARATION OF A "RAMADAN SPEAKER'S KIT." THIS SET OF WASHINGTON FILE AND OTHER MATERIALS PROVIDED INFORMATION REGARDING THE IMPORTANCE AND MEANING OF RAMADAN, AS WELL AS GUIDANCE ON KEY AND CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES OF CURRENT INTEREST WHICH WE DISTRIBUTED TO OFFICERS THROUGHOUT THE MISSION TO PREPARE THEM FOR CONVERSATIONS DURING THEIR BUSY IFTAR SCHEDULES. PA AMMAN ALSO SECURED COPYRIGHT FROM THE US POSTAL SERVICE FOR THE IMAGE ON THE POSTAL SERVICE'S 2002 "EID GREETINGS STAMP" WHICH WAS USED AS THE COVER FOR A GREETING CARD SENT TO 600 EMBASSY CONTACTS.

6. COMMENT: WHILE MOST OF OUR CONTACTS REMAIN DEEPLY AND

VOCALLY SKEPTICAL OF U.S. POLICIES TOWARD THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT AND IRAQ, THEY WERE ALSO PREPARED TO SEPARATE THESE MISGIVINGS FROM THE OPPORTUNITY FOR PERSONAL CONTACT WITH EMBASSY OFFICERS. IT MAY BE THAT THIS IS SIMPLY A MANIFESTATION OF THE SPIRIT OF FRIENDSHIP THAT MARKS RAMADAN IN JORDAN, BUT WE BELIEVE IT ALSO CONFIRMS THE NOTION THAT WHILE U.S. POLICIES IN THE REGION MAY NOT BE VIEWED FAVORABLY, MANY JORDANIANS CONTINUE TO VALUE THEIR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH AMERICANS WITHIN AND OUTSIDE THE MISSION. IN ADDITION, MANY OF OUR GUESTS MAY HAVE SEEN THE IFTARS AS A CHANCE TO SATISFY THEIR CURIOSITY ABOUT WHAT THE EMBASSY IS UP TO, GIVEN THE RECENT ANNOUNCEMENT OF AUTHORIZED DEPARTURE AND THE RUMORS OF IMMINENT MILITARY ACTION AGAINST IRAQ. WHATEVER THE MOTIVES, WE BELIEVE THAT THE JORDANIAN RESPONSE TO SUCH SOCIAL AND CULTURAL EVENTS UNDERLINES THE VALUE OF AN ACTIVE OUTREACH PROGRAM IN SUSTAINING THE LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIP DURING TENSE TIMES. BERRY